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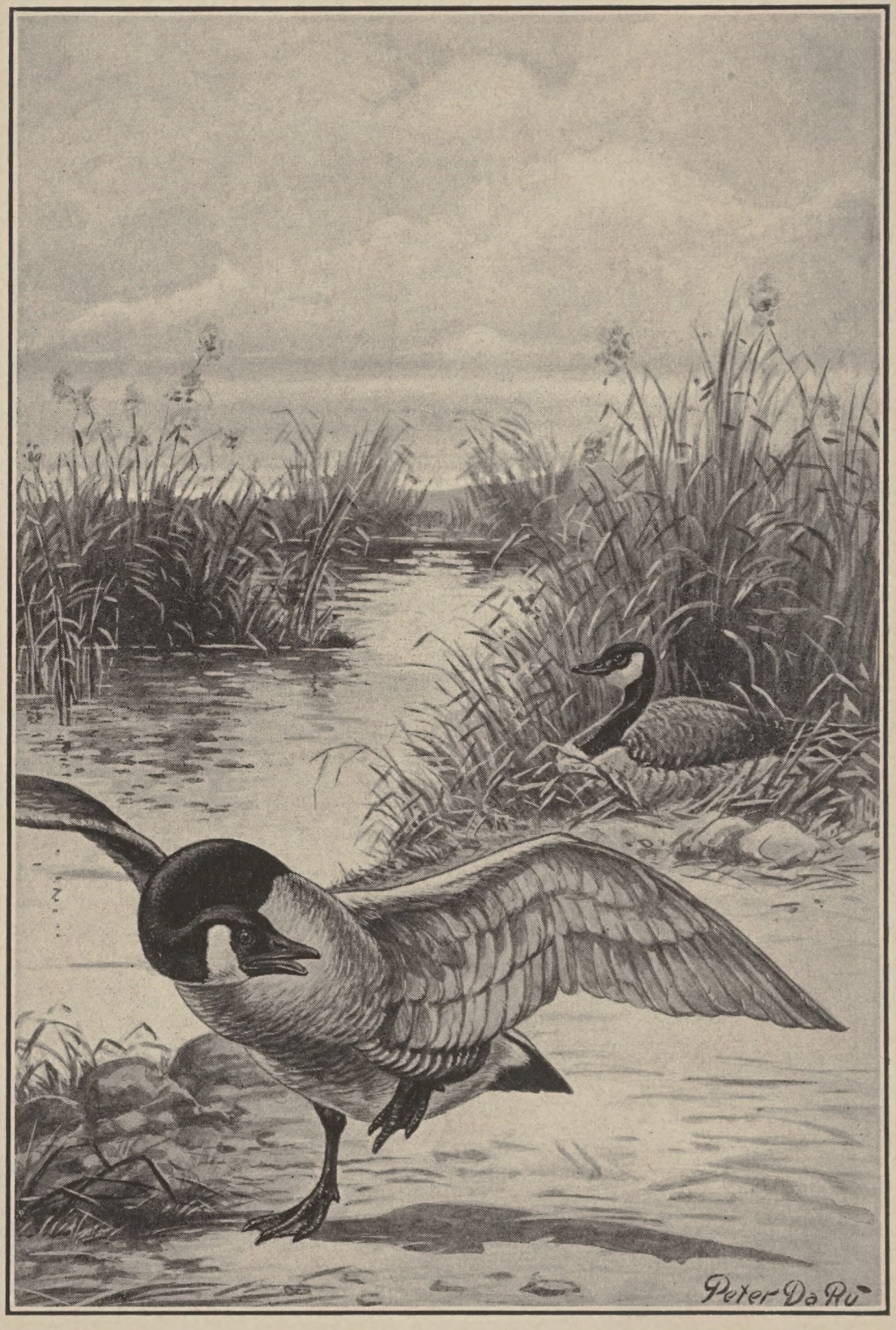
# THE TRAVELS OF
# HONK-A-TONK




"Honk-a-Tonk paced back and forth to warn off all intruders"

—*Page 7*

# THE TRAVELS OF HONK-A-TONK AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ALLEN CHAFFEE

Author of

"The Adventures of Twinkly Eyes, the Little Black Bear," "Trail and Tree-Top," "Lost River, or The Adventures of Two Boys in the Big Woods," and "The Adventures of Fleet Foot and Her Fawns"

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PETER DA RU

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*The Travels of Honk-a-Tonk*

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for Children

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# THE TRAVELS OF HONK-A-TONK

## I

### THE FEATHERED AEROPLANE

All summer he had been preparing for the long journey to the Southland.

From the time he first chipped through the green-white shell, on their islet on Anticosti, and had made his first unsteady little flight into the sedgy shallows, he had been told of the migration in which he was to join or be left behind, when autumn chilled their little paradise of plenty.

He had grown like the weeds he lived on, till now he was as handsome a wild goose as could be found on the St. Lawrence,—was Honk-a-tonk, the gray gander.

Every day now the skies were cut by flying wedges that streamed across the sun, trum-

peting their mellow "Honk-honk, honk-a-tonk-a-tonk." The sound filled him with a wild unrest, a desire to be on the way,—just where he did not know, so long as it was on the Great Adventure.

Then one day it came,—the call to join ranks behind his mother, who, in her widowhood (his father had been captured by a fox), had decided to follow several of her neighbors who were now ready to go South.

It wasn't the easiest thing in the world for the young geese to get started in that V-shaped formation that would leave each member of the group an outlook unimpeded.

They had to begin their flight with a little jump into the air. As they mounted slowly above the swell of the ground air, where it was so hard to keep one's balance, they worked their wings with a screw-like action that formed figure eights as they struck the air. Downward and forward, then upward and forward, alternately, went their huge propellers, for all the world like those of an aeroplane.

(Indeed, are not the feathered folk the

Divine Pattern on which man has modeled his flying apparatus?)

It was easier going, higher up. The matter of balance and control having become a habit, at least in fair weather, Honk-a-tonk now had time to see how the earth looks from on high. Fields, farms and forests, rivers and roadways, and far off to the left, the ragged white line that divided sea and shore, lay spread beneath him.—Or rather, so fast was his flight that the scenery gave the illusion of racing toward him.

Then came a stiff air current, and for awhile he had all he could do to manage his body, wings and tail. Once he and those of his brothers and sisters who flew at the rear of the wedge were struck by an unexpected gust of wind that sent them off on a tail-spin, and it was just about all their lives were worth to recover their balance. After that Honk-a-tonk kept a weather eye out for aerial whirlpools.

Now they came to a smooth down current that required no more effort than coasting.

That rested their wings against the next emergency.

Next they came to a wide stretch of sandy beach on which the sun beat hotly, and the air was rising in an up-grade current that made it possible to soar into the cloudless blue.

They passed gulls sailing like kites above the cliffs, up whose sides rushed a continual draft. Then the chill of the ocean, and its aerial down-current, brought them coasting down so close to the shore line that Honk-a-tonk could see Mother Carey's Chickens gliding up and down, up and down, as they rose in the tiny drafts that rebound from the water along the swell of each successive wave.

Thus passed the first day. Sunset found the little flock volplaning in a long spiral glide to the surface of a tide-water pond, which seemed to rise sickeningly to meet them, till they struck with a muffled whirring of their great gray wings and a glittering splash.

Honk-a-tonk was ravenous, for he had been

traveling on high speed all afternoon. So were the neighbor flocks, which had kept close all day, calling merrily back and forth with their varied "K'wonks."

My, what quantities of pond weed, what bushels of wild rice, what salads of wild celery, what thousands upon thousands of grass roots and weed seeds they managed to consume, before the edge was taken off their appetites. Then how they bathed and prinked and gabbled, and curtesied to one another, and preened their feathers that all might be in ship shape for the morrow! But with the coming of the night, they dropped sound asleep standing up, and slept till nearly sunrise.

The next day they passed a flock of Black-polls, and flew side by side for a little way, exchanging greetings. The Black-polls explained that they had been nesting in Labrador, and were now heading South for a winter in Brazil. They would fly via Key West, Jamaica and the coast of South America. The gray geese marvelled that these tiny warblers would travel seven thousand miles.

"Why do you go so far?" asked Honk-a-tonk.

"Labrador freezes. No food—no food—snow and cold—snow and cold!" they answered him in a chorus. "Zwe-zwe-ee-ee-ee!"

"Then why don't you stay in the South?"

"Oh, but you don't know the Labrador summers!—Such feasting—such feasting—such feasting! Mosquitoes that thick you could eat your fill almost without stirring from the spot! It's the *only place* to bring up a family of children before they're old enough to fend for themselves." And they were off with their vigorous "Zwe-zwe-ee-ee-ee."

The next day the flock was struck by an early snow-squall, and only the sound of the breakers on the shore below, and the repeated calls of their leader, flying low, guided them through the maze of swirling white. They passed through that and were up among the warmer rain clouds, and Honk-a-tonk could see nothing down below save gray mists, while the clouds themselves

drove by like ships in a tempest. But by and by they had passed even these.

That night they camped on a river whose glint they had been following. They disposed themselves for sleep on the larger of the rocks jutting from the rapids, for only so would they feel safe, with the woods such a fine place for foxes.

They were just beginning their breakfast of wild rice when an orange breasted carrier pigeon, with tail as long as his body, landed beside them for a drink, flapping his wings to check the speed of his fall. On one leg he wore a silver anklet, bearing his number, while tied beneath his chin was a tiny message. The geese crowded curiously around him, for never before had they seen one of his species.

"Can't stop, can't stop," he cooed nervously. "I must get back home as fast as ever I can."

"Nonsense, what is your hurry?" urged Honk-a-tonk, who would have enjoyed questioning him further. But the pigeon was already speeding Westward.

"He must have something mighty important to attend to," thought the youthful gander.

That day the streaks of white they had seen at sunrise developed into icy winds that howled in the upper air, and the flocks called soundingly back and forth to one another, as they rode the bracing breeze. But by the morrow they had left the winds behind, and to their nostrils came the warm earth smells of the Southern state over which they were then traveling. Honk-a-tonk soon came to know the weather signs.

Sometimes they had to sleep in a patter of rain; but they minded not at all, so wonderfully did their oily feathers shed the drops. Sometimes they passed a flock of tame geese,—big, white, stupid fellows. How they jeered at them! And once the little gander on the end of the line just escaped a weasel.

They had a dreadful time getting by a swamp where hunters brought down two of their number. But for the most part, the trip passed happily enough.

Thus by easy stages, past plains and mountain peaks, they sailed the skies, till winter found them on the rich lagoons of the Gulf of Mexico, resting for the return flight in the spring.

## II

### BRANTA AND THE GOSLINGS

The Northward trip was even more delightful, because no mishap befell anyone at the hands of hunters.

Summer found the flock once more on their isle at Anticosti, where the younger generation spent long, blissful hours feasting and fattening, and racing one another in air and water.

It was not till their second trip to the South had been accomplished and the flocks (now the larger for last year's brood), had once more returned to the land of plenty, that something very wonderful happened to Honk-a-tonk.

That was the wooing and winning of Branta, the belle of all Anticosti (or so, at least, it seemed to Honk-a-tonk).

Canada geese are faithful lovers, and when once their little home in the reeds has

been established, it is a certainty that the happy pair will live out their allotted two score years and ten together,—if no ill befalls from fox or other enemy. Indeed, Branta assured him with many a caress of her sleek head against his feathered throat, that even should he die, never would she mate with any other, and his assurances were equally ardent, as he stood guard while she brooded the nest among the reeds.

June filled the grassy nest with seven of the most adorable bits of goslings that ever broke the shell. How proudly Branta led them into the shallows, where they followed without fear, while Honk-a-tonk paced back and forth to warn off all intruders. How cunningly they dipped and paddled, just like Mother! And how fast they grew up in the likeness of the great gray gander!

Honk-a-tonk's feathery chest swelled with pride as he watched the little fellows learning berry and leaf and bud, running awkwardly after their mother, gabbling, gabbling, gabbling their small affairs.

Later they began preparing for the long

migration that would try their wings that fall. They must be well drilled, because if they proved unfit to keep up with the flocks, they would have to be left behind. The weaklings—if such there proved to be—would never survive to hand on their defects to future generations.

Every day they must make a practice flight, singing to the rhythm of their wing strokes to keep in line. Now they tried a night flight, by the full of the moon—for one could never tell what emergency might arise. And now they must follow their leader through the fog. For Branta was taking no chances, so far as their schooling was concerned.

Usually they slept in the marsh on some reedy islet where no fox could find them. Once an otter, swimming out to them at sunset, drove them into a tree. And always they had to keep a weather eye out for hawks, diving deep and swimming with only their nostrils out, till the marauder had caught some other prey, and passed them by. But thanks to their unceasing vigilance,

the summer passed, and still the goslings numbered seven.

Then came that wild clarion ringing down the air that meant the fall migration, and feathered voyagers swept across the autumn sky, sounding their sonorous honk, as the clans gathered over the hundred miles of Anticosti. From ponds, marshes, isles and tidal swamps, from shoals and inland streams, they mounted in long, swinging spirals, chanting till the heavens rang:

"We're off! We're off! We're off to the Southland, hurray, hurray!"

And racing past them came flocks of Arctic Terns, with their red bills and feet and their forked white tails, calling their brisk "Tee-arr, tee-arr!"

Came Golden Plover (black beneath), loons, and ducks of all degrees. Such a babel of bird voices—calling back and forth to keep their flocks together—never was heard before,—or so it seemed to Honk-a-tonk, his yellow eyes gleaming with rightful pride in his seven gray geese and Branta, as they formed for flight.

# III

## HONK-A-TONK AT THE VALLEY FARM

The Hired Man lay at full length behind a bush, gun in hand, and waited. Pecking contentedly enough at the end of her tether, one of the fat white geese from the Valley Farm cocked a weather eye at the heavens.

Suddenly a mellow "Honk, honk, honk-a-tonk-a-tonk" caused the Man to shift his position till his gun pointed straight at the clouds.

The Barnyard Goose, to whom the sound meant, "We're off to the Southland, we're off to the Southland," lifted his wings as if he would like to join the wedge that now streamed across the sky.

On they came, the long-necked wild geese, their bodies seeming like two lines of large gray dots arranged in the letter V.

"Honk, honk!" called the Barnyard Goose. "Wait for me, wait for me!"

The leader of the flock swept lower to see who this was with lifted wings and pleading voice. The fanning of the many wings now reached the ears of the Man behind the bush, and his finger tightened on the trigger.

"Oh, wait, I'm coming!" honked the Barnyard Goose, raising his fat body on unaccustomed wings. But the string about his leg brought him back to earth with a jerk.

Then "Crack!" went the gun, and the middle bird on the right-hand side of the V went circling out of line, flapping with one wing only, the other hanging useless. His flight became more and more erratic as he dropped behind the flock, finally turning him over and over in a series of aerial somersaults. A despairing honk told the leader of the flock that Honk-a-tonk was no longer in the running.

Slowly, slowly he settled to the ground, almost at the feet of the decoy.

"Hello, there!" the Barnyard Goose exclaimed, hurrying to greet him. "Awfully glad to see you!"

But Honk-a-tonk only wailed despairingly: "My wing's broken. I can't fly. They're going on without me."

"Cheer up! You're in the best barn-yard this side the North Woods," the Barnyard Goose assured him.

"But I want to go South," wept the wild goose. "I want to go on to Florida with Branta and my flock!"

"You're not going South—not this trip," spoke up the Hired Man, quite as if he had understood. The next minute the great handsome bird felt a wire noose thrown over his injured wing, and he was helpless.

Honk-a-tonk naturally thought he was going to be killed, as the Hired Man tucked him under his arm. And my, how his broken wing did hurt!

But fortunately the Boy from the Valley Farm came by at this moment.

"Give him here!" he commanded angrily. With understanding fingers he examined the aching wing, finally binding the broken bone by the aid of a handful of twigs and his pocket handkerchief,—while Honk-a-

tonk, who did not understand, hissed angrily.

"He'll let you go when your wing heals," the Barnyard Goose assured the newcomer. But that was not to be. No sooner had the Boy left the pair of them in the barnyard and turned his back to get in a few strokes at the wood-pile, than the Hired Man got a pair of shears and clipped the tips of the great gray wings till they could no longer lift their owner,—not till the feathers grew out again.

"Never mind," the Barnyard Goose encouraged. "It isn't half bad here."

But Honk-a-tonk only moped and mourned, as he saw one flock after another pass trumpeting overhead.

The flapping of their wings made him flap with his poor, useless one in his longing to be one of them.

"Now they are going to alight," he told the Barnyard Goose, as the dull red of the November sunset sent long dazzling rays across the meadows. For one of the passing flocks had begun slowly drifting closer to

earth and would likely alight a mile further on.

"Now they'll be settling on the lake to feed on eel grass and water lily roots," he continued lonesomely. "I can just imagine how merrily they are chattering."

"There is no lake down that way,— only grain fields," interrupted the Barnyard Goose.

"Well, then, they must be feeding on the scattered grains of wheat and hunting through the corn sheaves on the stubble field," he insisted. "Or maybe there's some of that delicious winter rye, as fresh and green as one finds in spring."

"But see what we've got here," urged the Barnyard Goose. "Come and get acquainted with *my* flock and see how snug and warm we are going to be all winter!" And he led the way to a little shed whence issued the sound of meal-time gossip. Honk-a-tonk observed that they were all white, like the one he had first met.

"Well, I can't say I like the turn events have taken, but here's for making the best

of things till I find a way of escape," he said to himself; and he approached politely, with many curtesies of his long black neck.

Would they greet him with angry hisses and perhaps fly at him and peck his eyes out?

Happily, the Barnyard Goose had paved the way for his coming, and they met him, not with hisses, but with a series of neck-bending curtesies like his own.

"It may be comfortable here in the barnyard, but it won't be the same," the wild goose told himself. "Branta may be searching hard for her supper, but I'd prefer plain sedge grass, if only I could join her, to the best table scraps ever set before me." And with a heavy heart he made his way after the Barnyard Goose who had first greeted him.

So long as his great gray wings had been clipped till all thought of those rapid miles of migration had to be postponed, it was certainly a piece of good luck to have landed in a place like this. For the geese of the backwoods farm had both food and shelter sup-

plied them in abundance. And soon he found his eyes closing, even against his will, as were those of his companions,—for the sun had set, and the night chill drew them close together.

Meantime what fate had he missed?

The flocks had swept on without him through skies of sullen gray, wind-swept and icy near the clouds, their wings beating rhythmically. Suddenly there was a hissing sound behind them, and one of the leaders, turning her head, caught sight of a flat-headed gos-hawk,—of all winged pirates the most powerful and the most bloodthirsty,—though so small in stature. The wind whistled through his feathers as he sped through the air behind them.

The younger geese at the end of the wedge crowded closer together, as if therein lay safety, while the older members of the flock flew with watchful eyes turned upward at their enemy.

As the gos-hawk reached a point directly above the hindermost gosling, his cruel flat head stretched downward and his talons

spread, ready for a clutch at the tender flesh, his cruel eyes gleaming red with blood thirst.

The great flock swept onward, the leader wary-eyed, though honking encouragement to those in the rear.

But now the gos-hawk, fierce and murderous, hung directly above the hindermost young goose. A moment more and he had gripped her outstretched neck with his talons, and, flap her wings as she might, she could not free herself from his clutch.

Then the full weight of the wounded bird began dragging the smaller gos-hawk down, despite the wildest flapping of his great, stiff wings. For he could not bear up her weight.

Should he let go his supper, or follow it down to the top of some tree and there eat his fill? Deciding on the latter course, he half-folded his huge wings and allowed himself to drop like a parachute, with the goose still fast in his talons.

They fell, with much flapping of their two pairs of wings, straight into the top of a spruce tree.

Just there the murderer had a surprise,

to understand which we must take a peek at Old Man Lynx.

That crafty freebooter, having left his cave some two hours before in search of a dinner, had just crept sniffing into a near-by spruce in search of Shadow Tail, the Red Squirrel, whose trail he had been following. But Shadow Tail had raced, squeaking with terror, to the tip of a branch so slender that it would not have upheld the giant cat for an instant. The little squirrel was secure, at least for the moment,—for had the lynx attempted to creep out upon his quivering victim, the spruce branch would have bent double with his weight, if it had not broken off.

The outlook was really far worse for the goose, whose Southward flight had been so harshly interrupted. For even had the goshawk's hold on her slender neck not all but killed her, no sooner had they alighted than Old Man Lynx began sniffing up at her warm, appetizing odor.

Now the lynx is not considered clever, as wild folk go. But with the odor of goose

mingled with that of gos-hawk, even before he could break through the tangle of boughs that blinded him, his nose told him exactly what was there.

He had just enough sense to know that he could not take his prize from the hawk without entering mortal combat with those great curved talons. If they did not scratch him bald and blind, they would inflict a worse injury, well he knew.

Yes, indeed, Old Man Lynx knew better than to attempt to steal a gos-hawk's prey away from him. He knew the only way to get his goose was first to get the hawk. But even so,—why not?

Honk-a-tonk was a heavy sleeper, else would his dreams have been disturbed, first by the gos-hawk's death agony, then by the unhappy squawk of a fellow member of the flocks on Anticosti, who was not so fortunate as to have landed in a backwoods barnyard with a broken wing.

The winter passed,—not so badly save for that homesick feeling that kept him longing for the spring, and the returning flocks. He

met Lop Ear, the spotted hound, and Krek, the pheasant cock,—who did not migrate,—and Shirr Chipmunk, and Shadow Tail, the Red Squirrel, and Chick-a-dee, and Frisky, the Red Fox Pup,—who peered longingly o'nights through a crack in the poultry pen, and licked his chops, and trotted away again.

And the prisoner told brave tales of his fellow migrants—and the Barnyard Goose cackled unbelievingly as he described the world's champion flight of the red footed Arctic Tern, who nests at the North Pole's brief summer of two months of unceasing sunshine, then journeys eleven thousand miles to the Antarctic continent for a four months' stay,—where again it has twenty-four hours of daylight.

He told of the Golden Plover, who in a single flight—without pause for food or rest—makes twenty four hundred miles at one stage of its flight, taking the short cut—the over-water route—from Nova Scotia to South America—though should he fall, he could not swim.

And he told of storms that test the har-

diest, and of the instinct that points the way, born of the experience—not of themselves but of their ancestors, and as much a part of their heredity as the color of their wings.

In return, he learned the little lives of the furred and feathered folk about the Valley Farm (for each had his story).

Then one glorious day in early April, Honk-a-tonk, his wing healed and his yellow eye scanning each returning flock that streamed across the sky, suddenly cocked his head on first one side, then another. It was Branta's voice, calling, calling, calling to the mate she mourned.

With one mighty effort, he raised the great gray wings that had by now grown out again (and had, by the Boy's command, been left unclipped), and leapt into the air. Downward and forward, upward and forward, in figure eights his long unpractised wings pressed back the air, as he balanced, every faculty in full control. His muscles were stiff from long disuse, but Branta—recognizing his agonizing call—sent the flock circling around and around till he had

joined them; and they were off together to the isles of Anticosti.

And the heavens rang with their joyous, "Honk-a-tonk, honk-a-tonk, honk-a-tonk-a-tonk!"

## THE ADVENTURES OF SHIRR CHIPMUNK

"Hey! Look out there, Cousin Chip," barked Shadow Tail, the Red Squirrel, as down the Old Logging Road he saw a man kneeling with a long stick.

The man, as Shadow Tail well knew, was the Hired Man at the Valley Farm, and the black stick spoke thunder.

"Look out Shirr," he called again, "he's looking straight at you!"

"Aw, he can't see so far," laughed Shirr Chipmunk. He whisked out of sight just the same, and none too soon, for a heart's beat later a shot rang out on the still autumn air, and something heavy zipped past the very rock on which the little fellow had been sitting.

"Say, but that was a close shave!" squeaked Shadow Tail from his hole in the hollow oak. "I declare no one is safe any

more. I've a good notion to move, and then they'll be sorry, when there's no one to plant nuts for them any more."

"Huh! you think you count for a lot in this world," scoffed Shirr, from a crevice between two stones.

"Well, all of us together count a heap, let me tell you," barked Shadow Tail.

Shirr turned to more important matters. Truth to tell, he was worried. It would certainly never do to continue living there, now that the Hired Man had found him out, for his bright eyes had seen much, and he knew that there would be no peace till he had brought Lop Ear, the Spotted Hound, and made an end of him.

"I just wish I were his size, and he were as little as me," he chirped angrily. "I'd chase him then and see how much fun he'd get out of it!"

However, this did not solve the problem of the immediate future. He had intended passing the winter here, where he had been so cozy all summer. It had been particularly handy, because he could emerge from his

doorway in the shelter of the rocks, and take a good look about for enemies, before showing himself in the open.

"A great time of year to have to move," he complained as he peered this way and that through the aisles of trees in the effort to decide where to go. "Every good location in these woods will be snapped up by this time, and I'll just simply have to move into any hole I can find that no one else has any use for. I can't stay here, that's sure, or that Hound will be digging me out in no time."

The little chipmunk had a hallway ten times his own length there under ground, but he knew how Lop Ear could dig, and he knew he would never rest easy in the little cave at the end of the hallway, when he might find himself being dug out at any moment.

"One thing that was awfully foolish," he grumbled on to himself, "was to dig only one entry-way. The next place I'll make at least two, so that if he begins at my front door, I can slip out the back way. And that

reminds me, I'd better get my excavating done in a hurry, or the ground will freeze before I've half finished my winter quarters, and then whatever will become of me?"

Shirr Chipmunk chattered angrily to himself.

Now that the Hired Man from the Valley Farm had found his hiding place, the hound would surely be set to digging him out. To move was absolutely necessary.

And yet he had built so carefully, here under the boulder on the hill-top! He had stored enough supplies in his snug cellar to last him all winter. And besides he was getting dreadfully sleepy. Cold weather would soon be upon him, and he had little enough inclination for starting a new home.

He started out none the less, to find a new site. Already the oak leaves were turning brown and falling in a thick carpet through the forest aisles. The grass was yellow and soggy from recent rains, and the air damp and depressing. A pale sun shone at intervals, retiring after each half-hearted performance behind a sulky cloud. And the sky

hung gray save for a mere patch here and there.

"A great time of year to be turned out of house and home," grumbled the little fellow.

To the west of his hill lay an open meadow, and beyond that the Valley Farm. To the south lay the hill on which Frisky Fox had his home. To the east was nothing but swamp, clear down to Pollywog Pond. And that would never, never do for tunnel building.

To the north, beyond the Old Logging Road, stretched a wide brule where the forest fire had swept the spring before. Now it was all young blueberry shrub. Oaks, chestnuts and beeches had been so crippled by the flame, that it had taken all their strength to heal their wounds, hence there would be no nuts, and it was most essential to have a food supply close by. There was always danger in going too far from home, to say nothing of the labor involved in carrying his stores from a distance. Where then should he go? On beyond lay unknown dangers, and it was getting dusk. Shirr was

tired and cold and hungry. Perhaps it would be best after all to take a chance in his old home.

Thus it was that just as the setting sun was burning its way through the clouds for the last brief moment, Shirr dragged his weary little striped body back to his cave under the boulder.

"Oh, Shirr! look out!" suddenly screamed Jimmy Crow, who seemed to keep track of everything that went on in the woods. "The Hound is coming!"

Shirr crept to the top of the boulder for a quick survey. There, sure enough, running along just ahead of the Hired Man, came Lop Ear, and what to do Shirr didn't know. His little furry chest fairly quivered with the pounding of his heart, over which he clasped one paw as his round black eyes gazed at the horror that was bearing down on him. The nearest tree was just too far away. His mother had warned him against choosing such a location, but he had felt so sure of his own ability to keep a weather eye out!

"Shirr-r-r-r-r! Shirr-r-r-r-r!" he squealed, passing the warning on to his neighbors. And "Shirr-r-r-r-r!" they all took up the cry, till every one of his neighbors was under cover.

Until this moment the Hound had shown some doubt as to which way to go, but now he made straight for the little chipmunk.

Shirr Chipmunk had brought trouble on his own young head. For until he had uttered his shrill cry the Hound had not known which of several trails he was supposed to follow.

By way of making a bad matter worse, the little fellow now darted out of his burrow in a wild thought of escape, then seeing nowhere else to go, he flashed back into this burrow again. If only he had taken his mother's advice, and dug a second entryway.

Now Shirr is rather a striking looking chap, with his red-brown coat, and the black and white stripes down his sides. And with all this darting in and out, the Hired Man

finally saw him, and pointed him out to the Hound.

Shirr's teeth chattered with terror as he saw Lop Ear racing toward him. Then he quite lost his head, and instead of lying low and trusting to luck, he dashed frantically across the open meadow, and into the first hole he saw, a hole scarcely an inch wide, that seemed to lead down under a rock.

This hole, as it happened, was the winter home of Writho, the Black Snake. And if it hadn't been that the chill had sent Writho to sleep, it would have been all up with Shirr. As it was, Writho came to his senses just in time to feel the little chipmunk's departing tail tickling his nose. With a hiss of wrath, he started in pursuit. But meeting Lop Ear before he had wriggled half way out, he backed in again hastily.

Shirr, meantime, had made a flying leap, and was half way up the old apple tree and scolding for all he was worth. For Lop Ear could bay himself frantic, but he could never reach that high.

Just then a little pattering sound began rustling the few dead leaves that still clung to the naked branches. It was the first big drops of an approaching storm. In another moment it began to pour in sheets. The Hired Man suddenly remembered that he had left the hay barn open, and calling the Hound, he strode off home as fast as his hob-nailed boots would carry him.

But Shirr only clung shivering to his tree trunk, till the heavy down-pour had drenched his furs and set his teeth to chattering in another manner. Assuredly, this was no way to spend the night. So, taking his courage in both paws, he whisked back to his boulder, there to await what the morrow might bring forth.

With the first streak of clearing weather, Shirr once more explored the blueberry burn with a view to a new building site. Racing on till he reached Lone Lake, he found a sunny slope covered with beech woods. And beech nuts, as everyone knows, are particularly handy for a chipmunk to carry. He can stow any number of the three-sided little

things in his pockets, which reach in great folds of loose skin from his cheeks to his shoulders.

But his troubles were not over, it seemed. For who should come trotting along that way in search of adventure but Frisk, the Red Fox Pup! And no sooner did his keen black nose cross the trail of the little squirrel, than he started in pursuit.

Shirr scampered for all he was worth, till he found a crevice between two stones. And into this he flattened himself.

Life certainly had been thrilling for Shirr Chipmunk.

First to be chased by the Hound, then to have the Fox Pup after him! But in his crevice in the rocks he was quite beyond reach of those sharp white teeth, and the Fox Pup soon got tired of waiting for him to come out.

Shirr, impatient at the delay, heaved a sigh of relief when the sight of a brown bunny nibbling peacefully told him that the fox must be quite gone.

Here in the beech woods he was going to

have an even better home than before. For the forest floor was strewn with nuts. All he had to do was to make his tunnel, and there would be no further cause for worry. For with his huge cheek pockets he could carry his winter stores to his burrow in no time.

First he would have to use those same pockets to cart out the dirt. The little fellow set to work vigorously. Today there was a cheery bit of sunshine. Tomorrow it might rain. Ah! He had it! The very spot. On the edge of a tiny clearing grew a patch of juniper. With his tunnel entrance underneath the bushes he could emerge and take a survey without the risk of being seen till he had satisfied himself no enemies were near.

Besides, what fox would try to dig him out, when it meant getting his fine coat scratched by these sharp green needles that protected the berries?

Shirr began operations by digging a tiny hole with his handlike little paws, and carrying away the dirt thus removed in his cheek pockets. For he believed in hiding every

sign of his whereabouts from those who might like him for supper.

And just for fear he might leave the scent of his feet too strong and tell-tale around his doorway, he left each time in a different direction, and always with great flying leaps.

Trying the entrance finally with his head, which was as wide as any part of his body, he began to pack the dirt in hard and firm, waiting till he was at least his own length underground before widening his hallway. For in that narrow entry-way lay his defense.

Pausing by and by a little distance away to comb the dirt from his whiskers and wash his face for luncheon, he was startled by the sudden silence in the woodland. Where but a moment before birds had been chirping overhead, now there was not a sound to betray their whereabouts. It meant trouble of some kind, but what? Shirr peered curiously this way and that. There, like a great black shadow directly above his head, hung Cooper Hawk, with eyes that glittered down at him, and talons spread for

the snatch that would carry his prey into the air for a banquet.

This time Shirr felt sure his end had come! For in that instant the great bird gave a piercing scream, then dropped in a swift spiral. His legs rather than his wits determined him to make one desperate effort to stay on the good green earth, and he was racing like a streak of lightning back to his hole.

But no, he had attempted too much, for already he could feel the wind of those great four-foot wings. His striped sides quivered with the thought of the piercing death that must overtake him, and he had to open his mouth to draw a breath, and he uttered one agonized "Chirr-r-r-r-r!"

With the hawk's talons fairly tickling his fur, Shirr Chipmunk suddenly felt himself going down, down, down, as the ground beneath his feet gave way. In fact, he fairly slid into an underground cavern. He was safe from Cooper Hawk, but whose home had he thus unceremoniously entered?

It might have been a skunk's hole, for all

he knew, and he would be no better off than he was before. But it meant one chance in a million, of escape, and Shirr took the chance.

Sliding straight down for what seemed a great distance to the little squirrel, he came up suddenly with all four feet thrust into someone's deep, warm fur!

As it happened, he had landed in the burrow of a sleepy old wood-chuck who was as cross as he was tired. And this invasion of his nap by such a frantic, quivering little person, with his sharp claws all out, awoke him in a temper.

"What in the name of all that is annoying are you doing here?" squeaked the old chuck furiously. "Get off my back this instant! It's lucky for you I happen to be a vegetarian."

"Oh, please don't drive me out!" begged Shirr. "Let me stay just two minutes more."

"Out with you, or I'll help you out," insisted the old chuck, emphasizing his remarks with a nip on the flank.

Sometimes in moments of peril, one's

"Shirr Chipmunk is attacked by Cooper Hawk"

mind covers leagues of ground in a twinkling. In the brief minute it took the old chuck to drive him forth from his haven, Shirr Chipmunk thought of several things.

He thought of the huge hawk awaiting him outside, a monster with claws hanging ready to clutch the little fellow and tear him into bits as he flew back into the sky. And then he thought of the new home he was digging under the juniper bush, and the snug hole under the boulder whence the Hound had driven him forth. Was there no safety anywhere?

He really felt so sure that Cooper would be there to snatch him the instant he thrust his striped head above-ground that he could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the bird's great, speckled breast and four foot wings soaring away after easier quarry. It seemed too good to be true!

But his nerves were shaken, and he felt the need of food and rest before he could work further on his tunnel. It occurred to him to slip back to the old home under the boulder for the night.

The autumn sun, which but a moment before had been gleaming through a forest all reds and yellows, and the dark velvet of evergreens, now slipped behind a cloud, and dusk descended on the piny air. This made the going a trifle easier, and Shirr skipped along from tree to tree, around the blueberry burn, and down the Old Logging Road in no time. Darting across the familiar pasture in which his home had been, he slipped down the long hallway that led to his store-room, where for months he had worked harvesting acorns and ground-nuts and wild crabs. But what was that peculiar crunching sound? Someone was there before him, someone who was making free with his winter stores.

"How dare you?" barked the tired adventurer wrathfully.

The fact that the intruder was Cousin Shadow Tail made little difference to Shirr Chipmunk.

"Stealing my winter stores!" he chirped in exasperation.

"Why, where is all the big noise coming

from?" shrilled the Red Squirrel impudently.

"You great, big, thieving rascal, you!" barked Shirr, tail jerking angrily. "I declare, it is too bad of you! It isn't as if you didn't have a fine big store-room of your own, if you'd only take the trouble to fill it. Here I've toiled and slaved for months trying to get fixed for winter, and you come and help yourself the minute my back is turned. You get right out of here, or I'll bite your nose!" And Shirr danced up to him with open jaws.

"Dear me, what a lot of noise we can make," laughed Shadow Tail. "Be careful or you'll strain your voice. So you'll bite me, will you? Ha, ha! Why, I could take two of you in one mouthful. But I wouldn't like the taste. It would be too hot." But he backed away just the same. "I hope you feel better by the time you've slept over it."

And that, indeed, was true. Shirr had forgotten the quarrel by the morning, and called the cheeriest kind of greeting as he sped back to his beech wood. And my, how

he did work! By noon he had a tunnel sunk three feet below ground. With quite a nice cave rounded out at the bottom. Then a chill wind warned him that another storm was coming, and he left his last few loads of dirt just outside his doorway in a most tell-tale fashion.

The next thing he knew, the light was suddenly cut off, and his nose caught a strange breath sniffing down at him. Then he saw two great shining eyes! It was a weasel, with nose thrust squarely into the hole.

Now he was a prisoner, and he had no supplies in his cellar yet. Why, he might starve! If only he had tunneled a second entryway! Then he might be able to slip out the back door while the foe waited at the front. Such a delay, too, with winter coming on so fast and all this work to be done!

His main entrance was just the width of his head now, and the edges had been patted down so hard and firm that the next frost would make them as solid as iron. He could just squeeze his lithe body through.

A little inside his tunnel broadened till he

could turn around with comfort, and on beyond was a storage room, that, when full, would last the sleepy winter through. Beyond that was to be his nest, soft-lined with autumn leaves, and beyond that still, his rear hallway, his emergency exit, whose door would open away over, under another boulder.

Then a new thought struck him. Why not go right on with his work while the enemy waited? He had braved a variety of perils in the past two days, and he had survived every one. The only trouble was that now he could not carry the excavated dirt away; he would have to pat it down into his tunnel walls. Well, that was better than sitting there worrying. And Shirr set to work with a vengeance.

The weasel thrust at the narrow entrance with his pointed nose, his mouth watering for the tit-bit within. But to no avail. And by and by the sounds within ceased entirely. Could it be that Shirr had dug a second entryway and escaped? With a disgusted snarl the weasel slunk away, and began

circling about to find Shirr's back door. But there was none to be found, and at last he gave it up and went away.

And Shirr? Why, the little chipmunk had simply given way to that drowsy feeling and taken a nap.

## THE BIRDS' CAFETERIA

"Hello, there!" cried Chickadee, a little gray fellow with a black cap, who sat on a twig of the wild apple tree. "Tsic-adee, dee-dee-dee-dee!"

"Hello, yourself," shouted Pecker, a downy black and white bird with a red patch on the nape of his neck. "I'm going to be your next door neighbor this winter."

"How jolly!" chirped the first comer, swinging head downward, like a circus performer. The little hooks in his claws made it easy for him to cling to the under side of the limb.

"Yes," said Pecker, "it's a bit too drafty down in my nest in the Old Apple Orchard. Besides, it's too near Barnyard Tom. That cat will be the death of me yet! . . . The way he prowls around all night! My, but it does give one an uncanny feeling to wake sud-

denly and see his green eyes peering in one's front door!"

"My, I should think so!" agreed Chickadee.

"So now I'm going to chisel a new home in the south side of this beech,—and you may be sure I shall make it deep enough to escape the drafts." And Pecker forthwith began such a tattoo on the aged bark that the chips fairly flew.

"I'm awfully glad we're going to be neighbors," said Chickadee, fluffing out his feathers to protect him against the chill of the November afternoon. "Because now Robin Red Breast and Betty Bluebird and so many of my friends have gone South, there will be just you and me and Junco of our own crowd left, to hold the fort. By the way, I guess I'm in one of your old houses now."

"Yes," said Pecker, "but you're more than welcome. I love to build, and each year I flatter myself I do a little better than the time before. When do you suppose Junco will get here?"

"I rather expected him with that first little flurry of snow."

"Well, it really looks as if we'd have snow before morning," prophesied Pecker, between pecks. "And it's coming from the North, so I expect Junco is fleeing before it this very minute. I shouldn't be at all surprised if we'd eat breakfast with him yet.... And that reminds me, I simply must get this hole enlarged a little faster, or . . ."

"Sh!" said Chickadee. Pecker turned. Down the Old Logging Road, with the sun setting red at their backs, came the Boy from the Valley Farm and his father.

"He's the same Boy that used to feed us in the Orchard last winter," said Pecker. "I'm not afraid of him. Wonder what he's carrying?"

The Boy, dressed in a red plaid Mackinaw, had a long peeled pole across one shoulder, while the Farmer carried a box and a hatchet.

Peering this way and that through the naked branches till they found an open space, the two now laid the pole on the

ground and nailed the box to one end. Then they dug a hole with the blade of the ax and set the pole upright, the boy holding it in position while his father drove stakes all around to hold it firm.

They next nailed a couple of sheets of tin (cut from old two-quart tomato cans), in the form of a sloping shelf around the pole, as high as they could reach.

"Wonder what that's for?" chirped the little gray bird, but Pecker could not answer.

The Boy and his father waited till a gust of wind came up, then nodded smilingly as the box veered around the top of the pole till the open side faced away from the wind. Then they went back the way they had come, only to reappear a little later with another pole which they carried still further into the woods. Chickadee watched, his black velvet cap just visible, as he clung head downward. When they were quite out of sight, he began exploring the queer box. There was a sloping roof that would shed the rain, and a floor that extended clear out on the open side like a porch.

"It's much too big for a bird-house," said Pecker, coming over to inspect. "I wonder why they've set it all by itself, so far from any tree. And what in the world do you suppose that tin shelf is for? It slopes down, so no one could possibly get a foot-hold. There is something mighty mysterious about this thing!"

It was well for Pecker that he finished his hole that afternoon. For next morning they woke to a world of white. Not only was the ground covered, but the feathery swirl from the sky had loaded every branch and twig with frosting, and one could hardly see for the white mist that filled the air.

"Chip-churr, chip-churr! I say, there," called a clear voice from the ground below.

Chickadee poked his head forth and peered intently at what at first appeared to be a big brown leaf drifting about. It drifted to the top of a sapling, and Chickadee flew down to have a look.

"Why, it's Junco, as I live!" he exclaimed. "How are you, Stranger?"

"Fine!" declared the plump newcomer.

He was leaf brown on top. Underneath he had white feathers to match the snow, and white sides to his tail. His bill, too, was white.

"I declare," called Pecker, thrusting his head just out of his hole, "you always look so like the bark of a tree from above that I can scarcely tell you are there!"

"Neither can Cooper Hawk," laughed Junco.

"Welcome to our winter colony!"

"It's a summer colony to me," chirped Junco. "If you want to know what winter is, just migrate up to the Arctic Circle. . . . But there's fine eating there all summer," and he began hungrily boring into an oak gall for the little worm inside. "But tell me, what have you up there?" nodding toward the box on the pole.

"Search me!" said Chickadee, setting to work to look for grubs on the under side of a limb, while Pecker began marching up and down the snowy tree-trunk with head cocked to hear the gnawing of insects under the bark.

All day the white flakes fell feather-like. That night it turned still colder, and the snow froze into an icy crust. And when the sun rose again, every tiny branchlet gleamed like silver.

"My, how cold my feet are!" shivered Chickadee, as he poked his little black head from his hole.

"Are you there, Pecker?" calling across to the beech tree. "I'm glad to see your red muffler. Didn't know but that I might find you frozen stiff." For the tiny black and white bird, with stiff tail braced against the trunk, was already trying to peck a hole through the ice.

"Slim pickings it will be today," he grumbled. "Might as well freeze as starve."

"That's right," agreed Junco gloomily.

All forenoon they tried to peck through the ice to their food. And their little stomachs began to feel dreadfully empty. "I wonder how long we could live without eating," Chickadee wondered faintly, as noon passed and there were still no signs of thaw.

Then there was a crunching sound down

the Old Logging Road (Junco began pretending that he was just a brown leaf flecked with snow). It was the Boy from the Valley Farm again. This time he carried a long, slender stick, with just a tiny box on top of it. Coming to a stand-still directly underneath the pole house, he raised his stick till the end reached the platform of the little porch, then he emptied the box with a sudden jerk of the stick and passed on.

Chickadee peered after him bright eyed, then flew to see what it was all about. The next moment he set up a joyous call. "Come here, fellows, tsic-a-dee, dee-dee-dee-dee!" he sang joyously, "it's a regular feast!"

Pecker and Junco lost no time in accepting the invitation, and all fell to hungrily. For there were chopped raw peanuts, cheap raisins and suet, and all sorts of table scraps, with even a little sunflower seed. "It's a regular cafeteria," said Junco. "We'll each help ourselves to what we like best."

But the words were hardly out of his bill before a slim white form, for all the world like a snake, with its evil flat head,—except

that it wore fur,—began to climb the adjoining pine tree. . . . It was Slim the Weasel, of all the wood folk the most dreaded. Chickadee, Pecker and Junco were so busy feasting that they did not even see him.

Slim's little red eyes gleamed hungrily, for he was fond of birds. But unfortunately for himself, the Boy had set the pole in a clearing, and the nearest branch was still too far away for him to venture a leap.

Disgusted, he dropped to the ground, and started climbing the pole, only to come plump against the slanting shelf of tin. The shelf was just too wide for him to climb, and too high for him to leap. Again and again he tried, but to no avail, and he finally gave it up and went away.

"Why, *that's* what the little tin shelf is for," marvelled Chickadee. "That Boy's our friend! Tsic-a-dee, tsic-a-dee, dee-dee-dee-dee-dee!"

Now Chickadee was not the only winter's refugee to whom the Boy was kind.

To Mother Grouse Hen and her chicks, the

long, hard winter had been one of suffering and peril.

First had come the deep, dry, drifting snow, and the bitter cold and wind. That had not been so bad except for the difficulty of getting out for food. For the chicks, now well grown, and plump and sleek from the autumn's berrying, had all snuggled down into a drift together (where the warmth of their breathing had hollowed out a cave for them). There the drift had hidden them alike from frost and fox and hawk.

It was really quite comfortable there at first, in the heart of the drift, as they huddled together for mutual warmth. For the snow was full of oxygen, and they got all the air they needed.

But after about three days of this, their hunger began to draw painfully at their empty crops. And they fared forth, braving the biting cold, on the chance of finding a few cedar and juniper berries. It had been scant pickings, I can tell you, with even the junipers buried in snow and a wind that made flying a gamble for feathered folk.

They would lift their wings and make a brave start for a cedar tree, perhaps—and land, instead, on an oak, whose bare branches offered nothing they could eat.

But all that had not been half as bad as the privations that had come when, with a thaw and a freeze, the crust had hardened into a glittering shell over every drift.

Then, indeed, had their stanch hearts all but failed within them. Blinded, suffocated, they ploughed this way and that through their white prison. Finally, though, they pecked a way through the icy crust. It had taken their combined efforts, working on one part after another, before they had found a thin place where they could peck clear through.

Once released, there had been the problem of finding food. For they were weak from fasting, one or two of the chicks being hardly able to lift their wings from sheer starvation.

Even when they had found juniper berries up-thrust on their prickly branches above the snow, there had been a crust of ice to

peck through, before even one frozen berry could be swallowed. Then one day something happened.

"Crunch, crunch, crunch!" came someone's footsteps.

Could it be Jake, the Hired Man with the black stick that spit fire and death, Mother Grouse Hen asked herself, as she and her little family beat the air to the heart of a spruce tree.

From between the green-black foliage, drooping with thick snow, she watched with yellow eyes that blinked nervously.

Down the Old Logging Road came a lad of fourteen or thereabouts, his great round cruiser snowshoes making footprints oddly out of proportion to his size.

His red muffler made a bright spot in the landscape that could have been seen anywhere against the surrounding whiteness. So also did his red checked Mackinaw blanket coat. His feet were encased in furry moose-hire larrigans that reached half way to his knees. And from his lips issued a cheery whistle that cut the stillness of the

wood-land like a ray of light thrown suddenly into the dark.

What the boy did next will always be a matter of wonder to Mother Grouse Hen,—one of those things that seem too good to be true,—although he repeated the performance often enough during the weeks that followed. (Indeed, without his interest in the tragic little lives of the feathered folk, there would have been many a tiny pile of fleshless feathers and frozen bones before returning spring brought relief and plenty to the forest folk.)

Thrusting his mittened hand deep into his coat pocket, the Boy first scattered a handful of crumbs from his mother's bread-box over the frozen snow. Then he climbed a spruce tree and tied a great, creamy strip of suet high in its swaying top. Finally, he fished into another pocket and strewed grain, the sweepings of the mangers, before the amazed little family,—and their joy was complete.

## FRISKY, THE RED FOX PUP

"Children," said Mrs. Red Squirrel, one day when the smell of wet earth, steaming in the April sunshine, mingled with the trilling of the robins in the Old Apple Orchard. "You will have to learn to climb now, there are no two ways about it!

"You are positively too heavy for me to lug around in my mouth any longer." And she ordered them every one out of the nest.

The truth of the matter was that she was worried about Father Red Fox, whose bright eyes had spied out her hiding-place that morning as he was returning home with a grouse hen for his family.

If the children fell out of the tree, he would surely nab them.

The two larger babies promptly followed along after their mother. But mouselike little Shadow Tail could only drive his claws

into the bark and cling, while he stared in a daze at the surprising world that lay all about him.

There was the pasture, over which he had been able to gaze from their hollow oak. Beyond it lay the Valley Farm, with its barn and orchard, and the fresh-turned furrows of the cornfield. Mother Red Squirrel had chosen a site where she could watch all that came from ever and ever so far away.

On the other side of the Old Stone Wall was the woods, a maze of brown trunks and green-black evergreens, with just a misty lacework where the branches were budding out. The pink flowers of the blueberry bushes that carpeted the ground beneath added one more color to the maze.

"This way! See how I balance with my tail!" his Mother urged him. But Shadow Tail only trembled, as he crept slowly after her. When, finally, he came to a little branch on which he could rest, he gave one look at the ground—so far below,—then crouched, afraid to move, his sharp little claws dug deep into the bark.

A sudden puff of wind shook his branch till he thought surely he would fall. Then a leaf blew across his eyes, and everything whirled dizzily around him.

"Come!" commanded Mother Red Squirrel. But Shadow Tail only blinked his beady eyes and scolded in his funny treble chirp. Finally she came back and licked his nose comfortingly with her warm tongue. But the little fellow just simply sat up on his hind legs and put his paws about her neck, till she had to take him in her mouth and carry him.

"Easy game!" thought Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, watching from behind a boulder.

The next day Shadow Tail was up with the sun; and he felt much spunkier than he had the night before, as people always do when they rise with the sun. But then, of course, he didn't know how Frisky Fox was watching all his movements!

In fact, as he thought of the way he had made his mother carry him along the last smooth limb, he was really quite ashamed of his lack of courage. And again he disobeyed

—which is about the most dangerous thing a squirrel baby can possibly do.

He could see an empty bird's nest on the limb below, and he wanted to find out what it was like.

Slipping softly out of the hole that made their doorway he sallied forth along the smooth limb that had seemed so impossible to climb the night before.

Suddenly his fragile claws slipped over the smooth bark, he scrambled madly for a moment trying to keep his foothold, and down he went.

Now there were a lot of things that Shadow Tail had never learned. One of these things was that squirrels do not fall to the ground, as nuts do when you drop them out of a tree. They just sail through the air like birds about to alight, for their broad tails buoy them up just enough to ease their descent.

The squirrel baby was no exception. So gently did he drop from the smooth little branch he was on that he managed to thrust a claw into the branch just beneath, and

there he hung for a moment trembling, his eyes shut, wondering if he were about to be dashed to pieces on the ground below.

As he realized that nothing of the sort were likely to happen, he felt a rush of returning courage that just enabled him to draw himself up again—and there, right beside him on the limb, was the bird's nest he had set out to find.

This nest, though a little wabbly, he found upon investigation to be just the right size for him to curl up in, with his plumy tail spread across his back to keep off the wind.

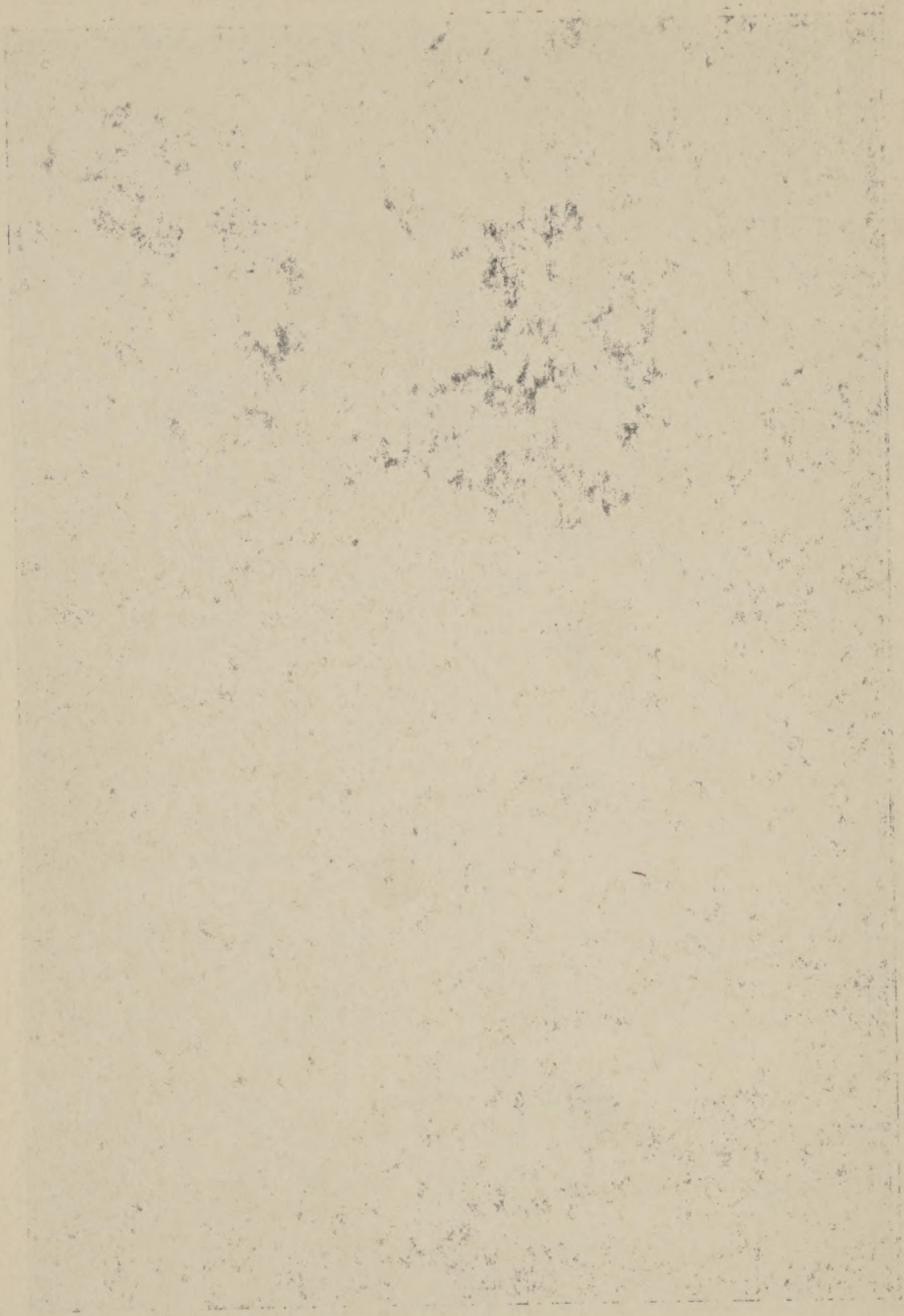
Then, quite by accident, he overbalanced the old nest, and though he himself escaped by leaping back to the branch, the nest, in falling, hit someone down below full on the tip of his sensitive nose.

It was Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, who had been sitting there beneath a bush watching all that went on. He let out an angry yip.

"I'll get *you* for that, you saucy thing, you!" he challenged in his high young voice.

The Red Fox family had been having

"I'll get you for that," said Frisky Fox



troubles of its own, as Frisky's Mother could have testified.

If Father Red Fox had been there at the time, it would certainly have been his place to head off that impudent hound, Lop Ear, when he came so near to finding the five red puppies.

But he was chasing grouse hens over on the other side of the ridge this morning, and there was no one to do it but the little mother. True, if anything happened to her, the pups would starve, because they had never learned to eat anything but milk. On the other hand, if Lop Ear got them, there wouldn't be any puppies to feed.

So, gnashing her teeth to keep her courage up, Mother Red Fox ran straight back into the ravine, barking to make the hound look around before he should come too near.

Of course, all Lop Ear could think of now was how he would like to set his teeth in the insulting little creature who had dared to challenge him. So off he darted, yelping furiously, the little mother not twenty paces

ahead, her red brush streaming straight out behind to help her keep her balance.

But that did not last long. She was really much lighter on her feet than the spotted hound; and besides, she knew these woods like a book. So it wasn't much more than a shake of a rabbit's tail till she was clear out of sight. But he was following, because his keen nose told him everywhere her musky feet had been; and if she ever wanted to get back to the babies waiting so hungrily on the hill-top, she would have to throw him off the scent.

She had been racing alongside Rapid River, which she had crossed away up on the mountain-side where it was a shallow brook. But now they were in the bottom lands, where it had widened, and she hated to plunge in and swim, if there were any other way to get back on her own side of the water.

Quick as a flash an idea came to her. Just around the bend she could hear the falls roaring and churning as they tumbled into a swirling pool. Taking particular care to leave her footprints plain in the soft clay of

the river bank, where Lop Ear could not miss finding them, she picked out a log that didn't look as if it could bear even her light weight unless she tiptoed across ever and ever so softly. Right there she made her crossing, leaping the last six feet clean over the ugly pool that frothed and whirled in a hollow of the ledge.

Sure enough—she watched it all from the top of a neighboring ridge—along came that clumsy hound, blundering straight across the rotten log with his nose to the footprints she had left for him! And just as surely—Mother Red Fox fairly laughed out of her little black eyes, to think how her ruse had worked—the minute he got back to midstream, the old log suddenly gave way beneath him and he went sliding into the whirlpool.

Around and around he whirled, just able to keep his nose above water by paddling his hardest, but quite helpless when it came to getting a foothold on the slippery sides of the basin. Lop Ear was certainly getting the worst of it!

Mother Red Fox would have been glad enough if Lop Ear had drowned in the whirlpool. Because just so long as he was at large, the five fox babies would never be quite safe from his jaws.

But she didn't really think he could drown, because he swam so well. And even if he didn't get out right away, he would slide over the edge of the basin after a time and come off with no more than a drenching.

Still, she watched from behind a bush on the ridge, till she saw that that was just what did happen. At least, he was ready to call it a day, and slink away home without giving her any more trouble.

Meantime she must get back to the red-brown pups as fast as ever she could. And that was pretty fast, you may believe, when she began to wonder if anything had happened to them during her absence. What if Slim the Weasel had got a sneaking feeling that there might be something good to eat on her hilltop?

So, taking as roundabout a way as she

could, just in case Lop Ear had not had his ardor altogether cooled, she let no grass grow under her feet until she had once more tiptoed down to the old den under the hilltop, where five hungry voices rended her mother's heart.

With a quick lick on each of the inquiring little noses, she stretched out beside them for a moment's rest. But there wasn't going to be any peace in the Red Fox family until it had found a new den. There was a nice one, she remembered, over on the opposite ridge, that she and Father Red Fox had come near deciding on last fall when they had first set up housekeeping. True, it was rather drafty, but now winter was over that would be no drawback. The thing that counted was that it was safe. No hound, to her knowledge, had ever come within baying distance of it, and no one, to look at the narrow crack through which one entered, would dream that it led straight to a fox family's home.

This new den, as she remembered it, was about three feet under ground, and through

it led a tunnel with two openings. One opening, far back on the hilltop, had a pile of dirt heaped up about it, but this was not the real door.

It was just their make-believe door. It was all banked up on the inside so that no one, like Slim the Weasel, could possibly get in that way. The real door was just that crack in the rocks, where the ferns would soon grow high about it.

Taking the biggest of the clumsy youngsters by the scruff of the neck, she, therefore, slung him back across one shoulder just as she would a hen, and trotted off to the new home, where she left him away back in the darkest corner with the stern command to lie still as he valued his safety.

By the time she got back to the waiting four, she found Father Red Fox anxiously counting noses. Having crossed the trail of the hound, he needed no argument to be persuaded of the value of the change, and he, too, seized a pup, and even led the way with all the air of being the one who had really decided the matter. One more trip and the

little family was comfortably settled on Lone Ridge. (At least, things were comfortably settled so far as the Red Fox family was concerned.)

There was some one in a neighboring tree, however, who held a different view of the matter, and that was Mother Red Squirrel.

When Mother Red Fox brought in a trout from Rapid River, or a frog from Pollywog Pond, the young foxes always sat around the prisoner in a fat row, their ears cocked as if they knew all about it and their pudgy paws making sleights at the creature as it flopped about on the rocks before the den.

But beyond a young field mouse that hardly made a mouthful for a pup like him, Frisky Fox had thus far never brought in anything larger than a beetle for himself. Not that he had ever wanted more than the sport of chasing something—thanks to the ample diet provided by Mother Red Fox, who had begun to supplant his milk with food more suited to his new little needle-like white teeth.

But from the moment Shadow Tail had

knocked the old nest off of the limb and it had struck Frisky, it became the one great longing of his foxy heart to catch that saucy squirrel. He therefore kept a close watch on all that went on in the Red Squirrel family from that day forward.

He could see the youngsters playing tag every day, so confident had even Shadow Tail become as he gained skill in climbing, and Frisky used to sit on the very top boulder of the ledge that marked his den and watch them chasing-beetles playing hide and seek.

Shadow Tail he thought rather set on his own way; and Frisky had learned from his own mother how dangerous it is to disobey. He was, therefore, not surprised when one day the squirrel baby did something that was very wrong.

Shadow Tail, having coaxed in vain to be taken down to the ground, where he could see a handsome red mushroom growing quite close to their tree trunk, waited till his mother was busy stripping off a bit of bark underneath which she could hear a fat grub

boring. Then, quick as a wink, and with never a look about him for possible danger, he scurried down to the ground, and across to that red mushroom.

He was just nibbling a bit off the side and spitting it out again because it tasted peppery, when he thought he heard a rustle behind him.

He cocked his head to listen, but the sound had ceased, and he began nibbling again. But just behind a little clump of bushes, a red-brown form the size of a two months' puppy was creeping forward inch by inch, as stealthily as a cat stalks a bird.

A second time there came a sound, no more than the crackling of a leaf stem. This time it made the fur along his spine begin to rise. Something must be wrong—but what?

## THE TRIALS OF SHADOW TAIL

Decidedly there was something wrong, else Shadow Tail, the disobedient squirrel baby, would never have had that prickly feeling along his spine.

For, crouching catlike behind a bush, young Frisky Fox was gayly making ready for a spring.

He'd show Mother Red Fox that he could catch something larger than a shrew mouse!

Had the wind not been blowing the other way, Shadow Tail would have known there was trouble brewing in the rear—though squirrels don't place half the dependence on their noses that they do on their "toeses."

But the wind was not in the right direction—as Frisky Fox well knew, when he chose to approach from that angle—and Shadow Tail was just beginning to tell himself there was nothing in it, when—with a

rush and a spring—young Frisky made a leap!

At the same instant Mother Red Squirrel, far up in the tree above, gave a shriek of warning, and her cry so startled the squirrel baby that he jumped at least three feet.

"Climb—climb for your life!" cried Mother Red Squirrel, barking her way down to him in great bounds, and altogether making such a racket that young Frisky Fox stopped short to see what it was all about.

"Climb!" shivered Mother Red Squirrel. Her teeth chattered with fright and her tail jerked up and down in her excitement as she dropped to the ground and whisked across to the neighboring pine so close to the pup that he all but got a mouthful of her tail!

My! How he scrambled up that tree trunk! He never stopped till he was higher than Frisky Fox could jump if he tried all day.

"I'll get you yet," barked the disappointed little fox, hopping up and down in the vain hope of getting just a nip at him.

"You will not!" chirped Mother Red

Squirrel's young hopeful, now that he was safe. "Not till you learn to be more spry than that!"

But his heart still beat hard in his furry little chest, and in his secret soul he was not so sure about it after all.

Now this was not Shadow Tail's first adventure. He had not had to wait for the Fox family to move into the den beneath the oak tree. It had happened in this way:

Away down below, at the Valley Farm, at the end of the wood road, there was a Little Girl. No one of the Forest Folk minded the Little Girl, she moved so softly—though they used to view her red hair ribbon with a good deal of interest, peering at her, bright-eyed, from all sorts of hiding places that she never even guessed.

Something called her to the woods this particular afternoon. The warm April sunshine and the sounds of birds and squirrels combined to make her feel exactly as if she would like to fling her strap of school books clear to the woodshed roof. But, being a girl, she didn't.

Instead, she laid it on the kitchen table, took one peek into the empty cooky jar, then went racing down the lane and across the corn field, leaping in glad bounds from furrow to furrow, till she reached the edge of the woods.

She hadn't seen the least sign of violets yet, though there were round checkerberry leaves that came near fooling her. So she wandered on, till she spied the old oak with its low-hanging branches which were so easy to climb.

The minute her feet began scraping along the bark there was great excitement in the nest in the hole in the trunk. As it happened, Mother Red Squirrel was away, leaving the babies quite alone. And Father Red Squirrel, like all squirrel fathers, had gone off to the club as soon as the babies came.

Of course, Mother Red Squirrel never would have left them, even to get her dinner, had she not first made them promise faithfully not to move or squeak till she got back. If only they had all obeyed her, things would have gone all right. But no sooner had the

Little Girl found a seat on a limb than she heard a tiny squeaking right beside her ear!

Peering cautiously into the opening, she thrust in her hand until it encountered something warm and furry.

Shadow Tail's little heart began thumping up and down, up and down so hard that it seemed as if it must burst with fright in just another minute.

Too late Shadow Tail realized that his mother had been right.

For, if he hadn't squeaked, the Little Girl never would have known he was there. Of course, he could not imagine what it could be that would make so much noise climbing into the old oak. But then woods babies don't have to know what it is all about. All they have to do is to mind their mothers, and they will generally come out all right.

Of course, too, the Little Girl never would have heard such a wee, high-pitched squeaking if she hadn't been sitting so very still, with her head right beside the hole, because human beings don't have nearly such sharp ears as the wood folk.

As it was, all she had to do to find him out was to twist her head around facing the hole, and she could peer straight into its dusky depths.

When her cautious hand had found something warm and furry, she closed her fingers around the topmost of the wriggling bodies, and drew it forth, and there in the palm of her hand lay Shadow Tail.

A tiny mouse-like creature she found him, with a long, willowy tail that just promised the plumy breadth of his mother's.

And because she was so happy at finding the cunning fellow, she never once thought how his poor heart was thumping, up and down, and up and down, till he could hardly draw his breath. She was not a cruel girl,—she had nothing but the kindest feeling for Shadow Tail,—but that was something he had no way of knowing. He expected to be eaten alive in just another minute.

Again, she never thought how worried Mother Red Squirrel would be if she took him home with her. All she could think of was how perfectly jolly it would be to have

him for a pet. So cuddling him warmly into her two hands, she raced back to the farm with him as fast as ever her short legs could carry her.

Arrived at the big farm kitchen, which was still deserted save for Fluff, the Maltese kitten, who had slipped in with her when she opened the door, she laid Shadow Tail on the clean-scrubbed kitchen table, where his weak young legs sprawled to all four points of the compass.

She now set some milk before him in a tiny dish. But, of course, the squirrel baby had no more idea of what that was for than an unweaned kitten. When she gently tried to make him taste it, he felt sure it was something very, very dangerous, and he backed away from it till he nearly backed off the edge of the table.

Feeling that he must be taught to eat or he would starve, the Girl brought him back to the milk dish. But by now he was so frightened that he resisted till he overturned the dish and drenched himself with milk.

He was certainly not enjoying his visit as much as the Girl had hoped!

To cap the climax, Fluff, who had been watching everything from the window-sill, suddenly began tip-toeing across the table.

No, Shadow Tail was not enjoying his visit!

And now Fluff must come sneaking up to pounce on him! He was so wet from his unexpected milk bath that his tail no longer fluffed,—it hung limp and spiritless, with the wet fur clinging; and what with being so tiny and so mouselike anyway, it is no wonder that Fluff considered it her duty to catch him.

The squirrel baby was not so young but that he knew the look in her yellow eyes! He felt the end had really come!

The next instant the Little Girl took him in her hand to wipe his fur dry. Quick as a flash he saw a way out of his difficulties. For there before him a long dark tunnel stretched away to no telling where! As an actual fact, the tunnel was the brown sleeve of the Little Girl's frock. But Shadow Tail,

gaining courage with the hope of escape, went scrambling straight up inside.

At this the Little Girl gave a shriek, for his tiny claws scratched her arm, and she didn't know but that he might bite. So she wriggled and squirmed about till she had reached up and coaxed him to let go.

As she once more held him in her hand she suddenly noticed how his heart was beating, and she realized how very, very unhappy he must be. And because she was really a kind-hearted Little Girl, she decided to take him back to his mother at once.

First arming herself with a peace offering of goodies from the pantry, she raced back with him as fast as ever she had come. And it was not till she had gently laid him in the nest in the hollow oak that she stopped having that sorry feeling inside.

Meantime, where was Mother Red Squirrel? She had been having a bad time of it herself, you may be sure, or she never would have left the nest so long unguarded.

As it happened, no sooner had Father Red Fox dropped the last fat pup into the new

den than he started out to see what tit-bit he could find for supper. The very first tit-bit he spied was Mother Red Squirrel, who had just climbed into a pine tree, with a view to investigating the crow's nest that swayed in its top. A crow's egg wouldn't be bad eating after having had her hands so full with the three babies! But no sooner had she started up the trunk than she saw Father Red Fox sitting beneath, just waiting for her to come down!

Not that Mother Red Squirrel was going to allow herself to be treed by a fox! No, indeed!

But the unfortunate part of it was that she had chosen a tree that stood by itself in the woods, so that it didn't look possible to reach a branch of any neighboring tree by even the longest leap.

Needless to say she had given up all thought of the crow's egg, for this time at least, because any attempt on her part to climb to the great scraggly nest in the top of the pine would have brought about her ears a storm of protest, had the crows caught her

in the act, and she would just simply have had to race back to the ground to escape their beaks, no matter how many foxes were waiting there.

Now, the nearest tree, a maple sapling, was still so far away that it would be taking a desperate chance to try to leap to its branches.

The tantalizing part of it was that, once in the maple, it would be an easy matter to go all the rest of the way home by running from branch to branch through the woods, because all the trees between the maple and home were so close together that their branches fairly interlaced.

She started to bark to keep her courage up, seizing this opportunity to hurl all the hard words she could think of at the old fox, licking his chops down below.

And so great was her excitement that she quivered from her nose to her tail, the vehemence of her bark lifting her clear off her feet, just as a dog's bark so often lifts him into the air, muzzle first.

Of course there was no one in all the woods

so skillful as the squirrel family at making flying leaps, their broad tails helping them to parachute from one branch to another. But in this case she could never make it, she felt sure. It was just a question of which was better for the mother of a family of helpless babes, to try the leap and fail or to stay there while her babies starved.

She took her stand on the topmost branch of her pine tree on the side towards the sapling, hoping against hope that something wholly unexpected would happen. Perhaps some creature larger than the fox would come and scare him off! Perhaps he would see easier game somewhere else!

Finally the unexpected did happen. A little breeze sprang up! It wasn't much of a breeze at first, but after a few minutes it was swaying the maple sapling right straight towards her tree. Seizing the very instant when the two branches came the closest, she made her leap, and landed, clinging safely, to the smaller tree.

Now when Mother had reached the nest in the hollow oak, she nosed eagerly over her

sleeping babies to see if all was as it should be. But when she came to Shadow Tail, all sticky from the milk he had fallen into, and all over his fur the terrifying human scent of the Little Girl's hands, she quickly had the story of his adventure in the farm kitchen.

So she gave him a bath, holding him in her two arms, for all the world like a human mother, licking his fuzzy orange fur till it shone, and combing his tail with her claws.

Summer passed, and Shadow Tail began thriftily filling his cellar for winter. (That is, thriftily for a Red Squirrel youngster.—He was not half so industrious as his cousin, Shirr Chipmunk.)

Then one day the Hired Man found his stores, nuts it had taken him all the autumn to gather—and began climbing to their hiding place with a bag to carry them away in. Shadow Tail was desperate. Without a moment's hesitation, he made a dash for the opening that served him for a doorway. Once inside, he took up his position a good distance below on his little hoard of nuts. And there he waited!

The Hired Man reached a foothold from which he could thrust his arm into the hole. Down he thrust his greedy hand till just the

tips of his fingers touched the little fellow's stores.

The next instant a darting pain ran through the Man's forefinger. Shadow Tail's long front teeth met through the flesh with a click, and his jaws clamped, for he did not mean to let go.

The Hired Man gave a yell, and tried to withdraw his hand, but the little squirrel clung furiously and, bracing all four legs against the rim of his hole, refused to let the hand be withdrawn.

The thief said things that Shadow Tail could not understand, though the tone was menacing.

But with the memory of all the long days he had toiled Shadow Tail had no intention of showing mercy to a creature so many, many times larger than himself. "So, you would rob us and leave us to starve?" gurgled the little squirrel through set teeth.

Then the Hired Man jerked his hand through the opening, despite all his tiny opponent could do. But Shadow Tail still hung on, his jaws set fiercely, and the claws

of his agile hind feet scratching at the Hired Man's wrist.

Suddenly the little fellow received a stinging blow on his head. Then all was darkness. What happened next he did not know. It was Jim Crow who followed overhead as the Hired Man went running back to the Valley Farm, the squirrel still clinging with jaws clamped to the swelling finger, though his eyes were closed in a faint.

Then the Boy met them, and pried the little fighter's jaws apart, and bathed the Hired Man's injured hand, while Shadow Tail lay limp at their feet.

"Wake up, wake up, Shadow Tail! The Hired Man will kill you, sure, now," Jimmy cawed helplessly from a tree-top overhead. But the little fighter never moved.

Had Shadow Tail's fate depended on the Hired Man alone there would certainly be one less squirrel to gather nuts in the North Woods.

For his attack on the hand that would have robbed him he would assuredly have been thrown to the cat as he lay there,

stunned and dizzy, at their feet. But the Boy from the Valley Farm had come in the nick of time.

He now picked up the little fellow and stroked him softly, cuddling him into the warm pocket of his coat and starting back to the house with him.

When Shadow Tail opened his eyes he stared about him dizzily. For surely he had never seen such a wonderful place as this human storehouse the Boy called an attic. Though he was still frightened, because the Boy was watching, and one never trusted these human creatures, he saw at a glance it was a squirrel's paradise.

Ranged along one wall were barrels and barrels of nuts—hazel nuts that one could carry away in one's cheek! And there were more chestnuts than he could eat in a winter, as well as harder shelled kinds.

Nor was this all. There were apples along another wall—barrels and barrels of blushing Baldwins, perfumed Pound Sweets and juicy Greenings—and there were other kinds, much more fragrant smelling than

the puckery wild apples he knew. His mouth watered, and he watched the boy out of the corners of his beady eyes to see if he were going to be left alone.

Nor were nuts and apples all that filled his heart with wonder. Here were great strings of seed corn hanging to dry from the rafters. And there were dried bean vines, and ripening tomatoes hanging by their roots.

How he longed for the Boy to go and leave him to sample them. Now, the Boy would not have cared if he had. In fact, he had brought Shadow Tail to this very spot, hoping to give him a treat. But how could the little squirrel know that? Had not one human creature robbed and all but killed him?

Perhaps the Boy guessed the way he felt about it, because presently he climbed back down the ladder and pulled the trap-door shut. Shadow Tail was left alone.

He blinked for a moment in a long ray of sunshine that crept through the dusty window and along the floor. Then he gathered courage and scuttled to the nearest barrel.

My, how he feasted! He paused in fright every time the wind whistled or the old floor creaked. But wasn't he happy!

When he had eaten till his eyes stuck out, he set to work to harvest some of the good things. There was a crevice underneath the window-sill. And one never knew when the hour of need might come.

But eating did not make up all of a squirrel's life. There are things he loves even better than food. He is not happy without his freedom to roam the woods with his kind. And Shadow Tail quickly realized that he could never be happy as a prisoner even here.

No, a squirrel could not be happy in even such a paradise. He wanted his freedom, even if it meant cold and hunger. He scrambled to the dusty window-sill, shining in the last rays of the setting sun, and pressed his nose to the pane that shut him in. And his eyes were wistful as he gazed toward the woods beyond. It would have melted the Boy's heart had he seen.

Indeed, he had never intended to keep

Shadow Tail a prisoner. But of course the squirrel could not know that, as his experience with the Hired Man had robbed him of his faith in human kind. He was angry still as he thought how that great creature, so many times his size, would have robbed his winter's store. And the thought made him more eager to get back to his home in the hollow oak. So Shadow Tail set his bright eyes to work to see if there were not at least a knothole through which he might escape.

By and by the Boy came up again, but Shadow Tail only scuttled down into a barrel of hazel nuts till all but his face was buried, and there watched, bright-eyed, while the Boy coaxed.

"Come here, and I'll take you back to the woods," the Boy urged. But the squirrel did not understand, and though this time the Boy left the hatch to the ladder open, Shadow Tail had not the slightest intention of venturing out that way. For below lay unknown regions—and besides his sharp

ears had heard the sound of the hound's bark and the cat's hungry mew.

Neither could his bright eyes discover the slightest opening in the attic walls.

A third time the Boy visited the attic. This time he must have understood, for he found the little squirrel with nose pressed flat against the glass.

"Well, then, if that's the way you want to go, you shall," laughed the Boy. "Aren't you even going to say good-by?" But Shadow Tail had waited for no second invitation. He had leaped to an old apple tree below, and was scrambling down its trunk, and across the barnyard, before the Boy could even get his head out the window to look.

## KREK THE PHEASANT COCK

### 1. *The Orphan*

It was one of those breezy days in June when the sun peeps through creamy billows of wind cloud that proved his day of fate.

Other young birds were learning to fly, and the fields were fragrant with pink sweet clover. The upper meadow was dotted white with daisies, and violet and yellow with vetch and buttercups. Plovers called musically, and a flock of blackbirds whirled and curveted like drilling troops till they found a treetrop to their liking. Trim-tailed barn swallows darted back and forth in search of food for their young.

In the orchard beyond the Valley Farm the Hired Man was plowing. The wood stretched green and shadowy from Mt. Olaf, while to the West the hills rose blue in the distance above the checkered farmlands. The meadow grass, knee high, was

peopled with a myriad of crickets, and bumble bees droned over the clover.

It was a day for feeling the joy of just being alive.

The Boy from the Valley Farm was crossing the Upper Pasture when he stopped to pick wild strawberries. Now it happened that Madame Pheasant had also been visiting the wild strawberry patch,—she and the one surviving chick of the little brood of twelve she had so proudly hatched the month before.

For in the little rocky glen that cut the pasture just beyond the strawberry bed there lived a cat-like black and white striped fellow, malodorous of reputation and very fond of chicken.

Here, in the fastness of the stone pit,—roofed over as it was with saplings and protected by a barbed wire entanglement of blackberry vines, he could dart out on any chick that strayed too near, and even Madame Pheasant be scarce the wiser for it.

To her, home was a patch of staghorn sumac. For, once her chicks were tucked

away beneath the vines of her own little rock-pit, it would be a warier hunter than the skunk,—and one less fond of keeping his fur intact,—who would venture a race for them there.

Little did the Boy imagine how near were the two pairs of bright, beady eyes that watched him gobbling up their berries, till with a sudden backward move, he all but sat on both hen and chick.

Madame Pheasant, with a startled cry, flew straight for the blackberry vines, while the lone chick half ran through the grass to the sumac patch. The Boy thus found himself between mother and chick. The hen fluttered and squawked in her effort to distract his attention, but only succeeded in waking the skunk. She was never seen from that hour.

Grabbing his big straw hat like a butterfly net, the Boy leapt after the chick. An instant more and he held cupped between his two hands a little cock pheasant scarce as broad as his palm, and as handsome in his

neat brown and white wings as anything you can imagine.

"Krek—Krek!" remarked the orphan hoarsely, and struggled free. And the Boy let him go.

Then came long, free days in the tall meadow grass, when Krek wandered beneath sunny skies, catching here a grasshopper and there a doodle-bug, or staying his thirst with berries. Even the thunder showers he loved.

With eyes on the cool green depths of the woods that stretched to meet the pasture, he used to try his wings, uttering a creaky call just as he so often heard those long-tailed fellows, the grown cock pheasants, uttering theirs, as they rose with a rush of wings from their coverts.

## 2. *Bunkies*

Then came a man with a mowing machine, who drove him from one stronghold to another.

The summer passed. The abundant food had made him into a fine, well-grown young fellow. The woods had become a glory of

scarlet and old gold and purpling grapes, and a sumac thicket blazing with the crimson torches of its ripening seed pods!

For awhile Krek feasted on the grape-vine that clambered over the sumacs and the stillness of the hazy afternoons wrapped him about with a great peace. Every here and there a sound like his own harsh "kre-e-ek" would grate forth with the sudden whirr of wings that marked another stalker of the forest aisles taking to flight. There was one young fellow in particular who came to feed at the grape-vine, who interested him,—a young cock slightly smaller than himself, but with the most amazing knowledge of the woods,—doubtless due to his mother's training. Krek followed when he left for an open patch where there were bugs and butterflies to put a finish to their feast.

Krek's comrade was an orphan too, now, but he noticed that most of the young pheasants still ran with their mothers, though the fathers held to the bachelor ways that obtained for all save during a brief period each year.

As the red and gold gave place to dead brown leaves that drifted in clouds over the forest floor, and the sunshine cooled before it left the graying sky, Krek and his bunky found that they could sleep more comfortably o' nights by huddling five or six young cocks together in some sheltered hollow.

The young hens also bunked together now, while the older hens sought shelter two by two, and the older cocks nested in pairs in the crevices of the rocks where the leaves drifted comfortably into the cracks.

Krek had his favorite shelters here and there in the woods, the best being the hollow that had been burned out of the base of a tree. Here the warmth of their bodies was penned in, while the hill cut off the winds that came down from the North. Sometimes the snow drifted clear over their heads in the night, but the warmth of their breathing melted a little air space so that they did not suffocate.

It was thus easier to keep warm when the snow was deep, though harder to find food. But there were always skunk cabbages down

in the swamps,—unfragrant, it is true, but filled with delicious little seed balls, cottony inside and shaped like toy pineapples. These were filled with half a dozen to a dozen seeds or nuts as brown and good as so many tiny hazel nuts.

As the spring sunshine melted the last white patches in the soggy glens, and the pink-white Mayflowers thrust fragrantly through the brown of the fallen leaves, a strange exhilaration filled him, and Krek noticed that the older cocks would get on a stump and boastingly call "ka-ka-ka-ku-ka," keeping up this performance all day long, instead of hunting for food. First one would flap his wings and call, then he would peer all about, and perhaps make a circuit of the nearby underbrush, then fly to the stump again and utter his challenge. And Krek wondered much.

A few weeks later, wandering over the south side of a hilltop that overlooked the brook, he came plump upon a gray-brown form that sat movelessly beneath a seedling pine, where she could keep a weather eye on

all that passed below her. Krek went on down to the brook to drink. When presently he retraced his steps to the open ridge where the grasshoppers were most plentiful, he passed the spot where she had sat, and to his amazement found in the hollow of the leaves twelve tiny grayish olive eggs. None but a pheasant's eyes would have seen them at all, so perfectly did they blend with the green shadow that overhung them,—just as none but a bird's sharp eyes could have seen the gray-brown hen as she sat there as still as a little mound of leaves.

### 3. *The Call of Spring*

But Krek did not at this time connect the calling of the cock pheasant on the stump with the pretty home beneath the seedling pines. Nor did he, later, think of the olive tinted eggs when he came upon the mites of down that followed the hen, scratching for little bugs the way she scratched for big ones, or raising their weenty wings in little darts at passing butterflies, cheeping their soft "t'seep, t'seep, t'seep."

No, Krek was quite without comprehension of these things until his second spring. Then, suddenly, he too felt a longing to fly to the top of some stump and call. For his heart was swelling within him with a strange unrest, half joy, half longing, for he knew not what. That he had become a handsome bird he was well aware. And he strutted up and down every fallen log he came to in the warming sunshine, preening his feathers and sounding his harsh song.

Then, one day, he spied a trim little brown hen pheasant watching him from behind a clump of jack-in-the-pulpits that here edged the swamp. And such a pretty bright-eyed creature he had never seen in all his life before. For in her eyes there sparkled—yes—a distinct admiration for his own splendid person. He stood forth boldly in the morning sunshine, preening his plumage with the pride that was his due, and watching out of the corner of his eye to see if she was taking it all in.

She was! His heart beat faster, and his veins raced with a strange new ecstasy. For

this day had destiny called him! He knew now why the first signs of spring had set him to singing the joy of life.

She was coquettish, though. For every time he approached, she ran away and hid. His interest deepened. Wasn't she a little flirt, though! (The demure brown thing!)

But Krek, it would seem, was not her only admirer. For the next moment he found himself the center of a vortex, the rim of which seemed to be composed of spurs that cut into his sides and wings that flapped about his head. To his surprise he recognized his buddy of the winter-time, now apparently bent on his destruction.

"You leave her alone," the newcomer creaked at him, ruffling his feathers and jumping up and down in his rage.

An even hotter fury took possession of Krek. Still slightly heavier than his foe, though less alert, he flew at this trespasser on his budding romance, thrusting at him with his own sharp spurs. Being of lighter build, the newcomer toppled over backwards, then took to the branch overhead and waited

"Ruffling his feathers and jumping up and down in his rage"

for a chance to drop on his antagonist from above. And because Krek was new to the game, he was taken by surprise by this counter move, and it was only by dint of sheer unwillingness to give in that he finally held the field. But by that time Brownie, the little hen, was gone!

### 4. *The Courtship*

The next day, however, she came again. But once more a former bunky disputed his claim on her, and again he fought.

And so on for weeks! It was enough to make one frantic, and he stalked about in a perpetual rage. There was but one consolation,—always Brownie's bright eyes watched from some leafy covert,—watched victory after glorious victory,—though she always ran away when the fight was over.

Truth to tell, Brownie was the queen of the roost that year, the very finest of the younger brood of hens, and desired of every gay Lothario from Mount Olaf to Rapid River. Krek meant to be king.

Ah, but that was not so easy! One there

was who had vanquished all comers,—one Hot Spur, a three-year-old of the most amazing agility and courage, and one who accordingly had things all his own way in the woods.

That Brownie secretly preferred himself, Krek had no doubt in his heart of hearts. But it was most annoying to note her willingness to witness Hot Spur's triumphs with apparently the same degree of interest she showed in his own. Doubtless her mother had instilled into her youthful mind the wisdom of picking the husband who could afford her the best protection from the perils of the forest. But that Hot Spur would offer her but a half-hearted devotion Krek well knew, from the philanderings he had seen the latter engage in with other hens.

The spring days melted away, and so anxious had Krek become for fear Brownie should finally yield to the charms of the conquering Hot Spur, and so filled became his feathery breast with rage at that same conqueror, that Krek actually could not eat. He went about in a sort of fever, darting

angrily at every cock that crossed his path, —waiting, waiting, waiting!

Then one day it came,—the chance for which he had been preparing! And while Brownie lined up with three others of her ilk to watch, Krek and his foe drew spurs to see which of the two was hereafter to rule the woods, which was to have his pick of the pretty brown hens waiting bright-eyed to laud the victor, and which was hereafter to lead the younger flock.

Now, Krek had the advantage of a slightly heavier body, for his early abundance of good food had given him a head start that he was never to outgrow. Hot Spur, on the other hand, was a more experienced bird and one who had had two seasons of battle to season his wits.

For some time it was nip and tuck between them. Each gave as good as he got, and each got all he could stand. Their cries sounded harshly, and their feathers flew, as they dug at one another's sides with their spurs, trying always for the head. By all the rules of the game, Krek would have been floored in

the seventh round, if mere hurt were the only test.

But back of all the pain, back of all the bewilderment of the whirlwind attack, his heart swelled with the pent-up longings which now made him aware that Brownie of the admiring eyes waited to crown the victor with her favor.

Then, so suddenly that it left him clawing madly in the air, his antagonist had had enough, and ran bleeding into the hiding of the tall fern fronds.

Krek was king of pheasantdom!

This time Brownie did not run away, but called him with coquettish backward glances to go berrying with her while they considered nesting sites.

THE END

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